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# The Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians' Conference in Canada

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**Myrna Driedger, MLA**

*The CWP, as part of the larger Commonwealth Parliamentary Association, works for better representation for women in legislatures throughout Canada and the Commonwealth. In July the 2012 Conference of the CWP was held in Quebec City. This article looks at the agenda of the Conference and future projects for the CWP (Canada).*



The CWP-Canadian Region is governed by a steering committee that promotes the views and concerns of women parliamentarians throughout the region and is responsible for developing programs to further the aims of the CWP within the region. It is composed of one representative from each

province and territory and one representative from the federal parliament. Each member serves a three-year term. Its operations are overseen by a Chair, who also represents Canada on the CWP Steering Committee – International.

The other members of the Steering Committee for CWP Canada are :

- Charlotte L'Écuyer, Québec, (Alternate Chair)
- Linda Reid, British Columbia
- Mary Anne Jablonski, Alberta
- Nadine Wilson, Saskatchewan
- Leanne Rowat, Manitoba
- Lisa MacLeod, Ontario
- Becky Kent, Nova Scotia
- Pam Lynch, New Brunswick
- Carolyn Bertram, Prince Edward Island
- Charlene Johnson, Newfoundland and Labrador
- Pat Davidson, Federal
- Wendy Bisaro, Northwest Territories
- Lois Moorcroft, Yukon
- Jeannie Ugyuk, Nunavut

Created in 2005, the CWP – Canada Region is composed of women parliamentarians of the provincial and territorial Canadian legislatures and the federal parliament. Its aims and objectives are to :

- Provide opportunities for strategic discussion and development for future and current parliamentarians
- Increase female representation in our parliaments
- Foster closer relationships among Canadian women parliamentarians
- Foster relations with other countries having close parliamentary ties with Canada ; and
- Discuss, strategize and act on gender related issues in Canada and internationally.

The CWP pursues these objectives by means of annual Commonwealth parliamentary conferences, outreach programs and participation in campaign schools across the country.

## The 2012 Conference

This year's format was different than in past years, as we focused our attention on strategic planning over a two-day period. One objective of this year's conference was to further define who we are as an organization by defining our Vision, Mission and our Values. By creating these three statements and by committing to have those statements guide the CWP's work, we have three simple yet powerful tools for ensuring continuity of our efforts to create a better future for the community we serve, regardless of who our members are. It was an enriching experience and I feel that by engaging our members in the process, we created a sustainable tool that will give us focus and direction to our organization and ensure its' success for years to come.

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*Myrna Driedger is MLA for Charleswood in the Manitoba Legislative Assembly and Chair of the Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians, Canadian Section.*

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A smaller committee will continue to refine the work that we did and a teleconference meeting in the fall will allow us to finalize the statements.

During our Steering Committee Meeting on July 15, members discussed the importance of developing a public website. This would enhance our ability to disseminate information to women parliamentarians as well as share information with others. A Working Group was struck to develop a proposal for presentation to the Steering Committee in November.

A Working Group was also set up to develop a written description of the Outreach Program in order to give it more structure. They will report back in November. The 2012 Outreach is planned for Quebec and the 2013 Outreach is planned for Newfoundland/Labrador. During our Outreach Programs we will work with local organizations and schools to engage women, youth and communities in the electoral process.

***If liberty and equality, as is thought by some, are chiefly to be found in democracy, they will be best attained when all persons alike share in the government to the utmost.***

*Aristotle*

The first CWP brochure was discussed and changes recommended. A final draft will be available this

fall. A decision was also made to send a letter of congratulations to Queen Elisabeth II in recognition of her Diamond Jubilee.

Forty three participants attended the CWP Conference. We were pleased to welcome Sir Alan Haselhurst, Chair, CPA International Executive Committee and Rebecca Kadaga, Vice-President of CWP International and President of CWP Africa. We were also pleased to have Observers from Ghana, Malaysia, Australia, Scotland, and South Africa.

A Round Table Discussion was held, entitled "Professional Advancement for Women: Can the Glass Ceiling Be Broken?" The panelists included: Andrée Corriveau, Founding President, Association of Quebec Women in Finance; Kathleen Casey, MLA for Charlottetown-Lewis Point (PEI); and Sandy Mayzell, Founder, Dancing With the Octopus.

The conference ended with the introduction of a new session that will take place at every regional conference: "CWP Woman of Inspiration". In order to highlight CWP women, every year a different CWP member will be asked to share her story through an inspiring presentation. The inaugural session featured Yvonne Jones, MHA for Cartwright-L'Anse au Clair, Newfoundland and Labrador, she shared with us her very public fight with breast cancer while serving as a Party Leader.

The year 2012 -2013 will be pivotal for CWP as we move forward to accomplish the goals we have set out to achieve. We look forward to meeting those challenges.



Steering Committee of CWP at Conference in Québec City. Front row l-r Mary Anne Jablonski, Charlene Johnson, Pam Lynch, Myrna Driedger (Chair), Charlotte L'Écuyer, (Alternate Chair), Lois Moorcroft, Jeannie Ugyuk, Linda Reid. Back row: Leanne Rowat, Lisa MacLeod, Susan Truppe, Carolyn Bertram, Wendy Bisaro